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ABSTRACT

This document reports on an investigation focusing on how the content of introductory college psychology texts' content related to physical attractiveness and self-esteem. The primary objective of this study was to review how recently published life-span developmental texts present physical development in middle childhood as related to traditional gender stereotypes. A secondary objective was to evaluate the integration of non-stereotyped themes related to a diversity of physical appearance, physical competence, and self-esteem. Traditional gender stereotypes evaluate male competency in terms of performance while physical attractiveness is the measure of female success. As a core component of pre-professional and professional education, life-span human development courses present knowledge about competency and self-esteem. An important question is whether the texts used in these courses challenge or perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes. This study investigates the gender content of 14 developmental texts published in the United States after 1986. In addition to reviewing the written text, the study analyzes a number of related components such as photographs, illustrations, sidebars, margin comments, summaries, and discussion questions. Preliminary results reveal that recently published textbooks contain numerous traditional gender stereotypes. However, the text and pictorial content also include many components that challenge these gender stereotypes. (DK)

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# PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS AND SELF-ESTEEM IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD: DO RECENT LIFE-SPAN DEVELOPMENTAL TEXTS PERPETUATE OR CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPES?

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Abstract

Traditional gender stereotypes evaluate male competency in terms of performance while physical attractiveness is the measure of female success. As a core component of pre-professional and professional education, life-span human development courses present knowledge about competency and self-esteem. An important question is whether the texts used in these courses challenge or perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes? This study investigates the gender content of 14 developmental texts published in the United States after 1986. In addition to reviewing the written text, the study analyzes a number of related components (e.g., photographs, illustrations, sidebars, margin comments, summaries, and discussion questions). Preliminary results reveal that recently published textbooks contain numerous traditional gender stereotypes. However, the text and pictorial content also includes many components that challenge these gender stereotypes.

# PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS AND SELF-ESTEEM IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD: DO RECENT LIFE-SPAN DEVELOPMENTAL TEXTS PERPETUATE OR CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPES?

During the 1960s and early 1970s, a number of researchers began to identify the predominance of gender stereotypes in numerous texts. As discussed by Peterson and Kroner (1992), much of the early research centered on literature and textbooks for children. The growing interest in gender bias led the American Psychological Association (APA) to establish a task force for investigating possible biases in graduate psychology textbooks. The APA's Task Force report identified concerns about gender-biased language and methodological problems in reporting data related to sex differences (APA Task Force, 1975).

Several researchers have studied the progression of introductory and developmental psychology texts over the past 16 years. The focus of Woolsey's (1977) study was reviewing introductory and developmental textbooks for description of sex roles. She discovered that few texts covered this information, but if they did, the description usually was stereotyped and disparaging to women.

Gray (1977), Denmark (1982), and Percival (1984) also found similar results as Woolsey in their reviews of introductory psychology textbooks. Percival did observe that the use of generic male language was generally absent and issues relating to

sex roles had increased. However, she also concluded that gender stereotyping continued and the presence of women in psychology was not adequately represented.

In their study of introductory and developmental psychology textbooks, Peterson and Kroner (1992) found that numerous forms of gender bias continue. Women's presence and contributions to general and developmental psychology are, in many cases, virtually invisible. The pictorial content of these texts portray females and males with gender stereotyped characteristics. Women and girls generally are represented as more passive and in a negative context. Males are frequently depicted as active participants in a positive context.

Human development courses are a core component of pre-professional and professional education for teachers, school administrators, counselors, and health care providers. Typically, undergraduates in pre-professional programs are required to complete a human development course. This requirement is usually met by completing a single overview course or, perhaps, year-long sequence using a life-span developmental text. An important question for those of us in educational psychology is whether or not the texts used in these courses challenge students to develop non-sexist knowledge and perspectives needed as they interact with children and adults.

Children, teachers, and parents labor to meet the numerous demands and requirements for mathematical, reading, and writing

skills that are expected in a our highly technological culture. However, our culture gives little attention to and has developed few resources for assisting children, especially young females, in coping with the message that success or competency equals physical attractiveness. Unfortunately, androcentric research and theories of development reinforce established gender stereotypes.

My interest in the effects of physical attractiveness on self-esteem, competency, and success of school-age girls is prompted by personal experiences and professional curiosity. Although research is beginning to emerge on the relationship of competencies and self-esteem for middle childhood, the major focus has been on the developmental stages of adolescence and young adulthood.

Coping with or modifying the androcentric theme that for women and girls success equals physical attractiveness is not my goal. My aim is to support a feminist perspective for reframing and redefining the criteria used to assess competence and achievement. This perspective values women and girls, their diversity and the diversity of their experiences, in and of themselves.

The studies of psychology textbooks by Gray (1977), Denmark (1982), Percival (1984), Peterson and Kroner (1992), and Woolsey (1977) provide significant results and important conclusions. However, they lack specific details for a rich description and

explanation of gender stereotypes as found in introductory and developmental psychology texts. I chose a qualitative case study design to investigate the variables related to gender stereotyping embedded in the texts. A case study provides the flexibility to explore a bounded system using a variety of theoretical frameworks and produce a holistic, intensive description and interpretation of the phenomena (Merriam, 1988).

The focus of this investigation was on the textbooks' content related to physical attractiveness and self-esteem. The primary objective of this study was to review how recently published life-span developmental texts present physical development in middle childhood as related to traditional gender stereotypes. Do the texts challenge or perpetuate gender stereotypes of female physical attractiveness and male physical competence as significant factors in the development of self-esteem?

A secondary objective was to evaluate the integration of non-stereotyped themes related to a diversity of physical appearance, physical competence, and self-esteem. Is diversity acknowledged and valued; is it ignored; or is it labelled in a deviant or "needs-to-be-fixed" manner? The final objective was to propose alternative activities (e.g., readings, discussions, exercises) that can supplement the material presented in life-span developmental texts for a less gender stereotyped perspective of human development issues.

## Method

### Data Sources

The developmental texts selected for review were obtained from four department faculty responsible for teaching human development to the College of Education and the College of Nursing and Health at a large mid-western, metropolitan university. The faculty in this department are responsible for teaching four undergraduate human development courses (approximately 500 students each year) and five graduate level courses (approximately 300 students annually). A wide range of life-span human development texts utilized in these courses, and complimentary "preview" texts were available for this study.

A decision was made to incorporate only textbooks covering a life-span development perspective within this study. The rationale for this decision was based in the knowledge that human development courses for pre-professional teachers typically utilize a life-span text. In general, textbooks specializing in one distinct stage (e.g., childhood, adolescence, aging) are employed only in graduate psychology courses.

### Procedure

This research project was designed as a qualitative case study of life-span developmental texts. This particular design is appropriate since the study seeks to describe the salient beliefs, attitudes, structures, and/or processes reflected in developmental texts that perpetuate or challenge gender

stereotypes (Merriam, 1988). Maximum variation sampling and content analysis were the strategies used to capture and describe the principal patterns contained in current developmental texts (Patton, 1990). The basic characteristics for each of the texts (data sources) are summarized in Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Texts published in the United States between 1987 and 1992 were selected for review in order to obtain an overview of the texts in current use. Utilizing maximum variation sampling, the target of three to four textbooks published for each year was proposed. A goal of no more than three texts from one publisher also was established.

Research data was collected by reviewing developmental texts published in the United States after 1986. Initial sections for review are identified by a examining the Table of Contents and Subject Index. The key words, headings, and indicators include: middle childhood, school-age child, physical development (or growth and development), physical attractiveness, physical competence, body image, self-esteem, self-concept, social competence, and gender (or sex-role) stereotypes.

In addition to reviewing the written text, the study included an analysis of the related illustrations, graphics, drawings, pictures, captions, sidebars, footnotes, endnotes,

margin comments, references, section or chapter summaries, and discussion or review questions. Each data element was coded as to its context in one of three areas:

1. Physical attractiveness (PA). Worth or success are described by means of physical attractiveness and/or body image.
2. Physical competence (PC). Value or achievement are indicated by measures of physical competence (i.e., strength, coordination, activity, growth).
3. Self-esteem (SE). Sex-role stereotypes are emphasized as measures of self-esteem or self-perception. Feminine-expressive characteristics are accentuated for females, and masculine-instrumental characteristics are stressed for males (Basow, 1986). Androgyny is effectively ignored or invisible.

Each data element was rated according to whether the following criteria, indicating gender stereotyping, are challenged or perpetuated. The coded data are then grouped to identify patterns and themes, and the results are summarized.

Text Criteria

These criteria are adapted from Eakins and Eakins (1978) and Paludi (1992).

Norms and standards. The male (especially white, Eurocentric male) experience is the norm, and women are compared with male standards to determine their significance or value.

Examples: Paid employment (work outside the home) is more important to the economy than work within the home. Males are the normative population for research, and females are studied to determine how well they compare to males.

Typecasting. Gender typecasting is evident in careers and activities. Examples: Traditional roles, job stereotypes, married women are at home, adult females are married, males are active participants while females are passive observers.

Characteristics. Males and females are represented by stereotypic attributes. Examples: Females have characteristic (stereotyped) strengths and males have theirs; males never "act feminine" (e.g., quiet, indecisive, emotional) and females never "act masculine" (e.g., aggressive, direct, ambitious). Detailed list of stereotyped characteristics adapted from Broverman, Clarkson, and Rosenkrantz (1972) and Ruble (1983) is provided in the Appendix.

Trivializing. Females are accorded less respect by trivializing them or describing them by describing them by physical attributes while males are described by mental attributes. Examples: Use of sexual innuendoes, making females the target of ridicule or scorn, portraying men as inept in the home, treating females who behave competently as the exceptions.

Achievements. Females' achievements are not recognized. Example: Men are the colonists, pioneers, and adventurers that take women along as companions to cook, clean, raise children,

nurse, and manage the day-to-day living. Innovations, discoveries, leadership, inventions by females are ignored and/or invisible.

Generic masculine. In references to humanity at large, language is used that excludes identification for or with women and girls. Examples: Use of generic masculine/male pronouns and titles that exclude females from involvement (e.g. mankind, fireman, chairman, policeman, mailman).

Designations. Disparate language is used to designate and describe females and males, or when both female and male designations are used, females are consistent mentioned after males. Examples: Man and wife, President Clinton and Hillary, Vice President Gore's wife or Mrs. Albert Gore, office boy, and girl-Friday.

Pictorial Criteria

Criteria for assessing pictorial content are adapted from Peterson and Kroner (1992). The sex of each pictured person was recorded along with a context code (i.e., active/agent or passive/object) and an evaluation code (i.e., positive, negative, neutral). Active/agent pictures of males and passive/object pictures of females indicate sex-role stereotypes.

## Narrative Description and Analyis of Results

Analysis of the data remains in-progress. At present, I have completed reviewing fourteen life-span developmental texts. Current results reveal that a majority of recently published

developmental texts present middle childhood physical development in a context of traditional gender stereotypes. In comparison to other chronological developmental stages, material on middle childhood physical development is extremely limited. However, at least some content that challenges gender stereotypes is found in each textbook. Table 2 presents a brief overview of frequencies that gender stereotypes are challenged or perpetuated in the three context categories.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Text Data

Physical attractiveness. Our culture is obsessed with the expectation of an ultra-thin physique as the ideal woman's body. As outlined by Surrey (1984), several self-report studies reveal that 50-75% of American women regard themselves as overweight. A 1984 Glamour survey (Wooley & Wooley, 1984) indicated that 76% of 33,000 respondents describe their bodies as too fat. This figure represents a majority of the respondents who were statistically classified as normal weight and underweight.

The American diet industry is big business, generating approximately $34 billion dollars annually (McAfee, 1992). Studies by Andersen and DiDomenico (1992), Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, and Ahren (1992), Mazur (1986), and Silverstein, Peterson, and Perdue (1986) confirm the stereotyped cultural

standard of female attractiveness that is promoted in the media. Television and magazines are filled with advertisements for diet aids and foods with "all the taste but none of the guilt and only half of the calories" of real food.

Research on the content and the intended consumers' gender in Saturday morning television commercials illustrates the gender stereotyped messages being aimed at school-age children. Ogletree, Williams, Raffeld, Mason, and Fricke (1990) found that the overwhelming majority of appearance enhancement advertisements are aimed at females. The commercials targeted at males emphasize independence and individuality. Do current developmental texts perpetuate these same stereotypes, or do they present perspectives of gender equity and human diversity? Worth or success are described by measures of physical attractiveness and/or body image.

Limited challenges are found in the reviewed texts to the gender stereotype that females' value is measured by physical attractiveness. However, one data source, Text "C", gives particular attention to the social construction and detrimental consequences of this stereotype.

> An intriguing and often tragic feature of the weight preoccupation of the U.S. female is that her weight concerns are so often unnecessary. Many girls and women who are not over weight are still preoccupied with the fears of weight gain, and many falsely believe that they need to shed "excess" pounds.... Furthermore, disturbed eating patterns (e.g., eating binges, self-induced vomiting) were found in one in four girls in all weight categories. (C-2-13)

> ...although women identify the lean physique as the one to which they aspire and one they think is most attractive to men, men have other ideas. When asked to identify the female figure they find the most attractive, men choose a physique that is considerably heavier than the one women think they will be drawn to--just as men erroneously identify the heavily muscled male body as the one that women prefer, even though women actually find a leaner physique more attractive in men. (C-2-14)

> If good-looking people are perceived as being more pleasant, more approachable, more desirable to have as friends, more achievement-oriented, and more likely to succeed in life, does this mean that they really possess these characteristics? As a matter of fact, the attractiveness bias...may be an expectation that fulfills itself. (C-2-18)

> Research also points to a bias in our society in favor of physically attractive people. We may like to believe that people should be judged on the basis of their character instead of an their looks. Some writers suggest, however, that if we deny the importance that is place on physical beauty we are ignoring a very real form of discrimination, and one that is very painful to many people. (C-2-20)

Unfortunately, a greater number of texts fail to challenge the physical attractiveness stereotype, and its destructive influence is perpetuated.

> What makes some children more popular with "the other kids" than others? For one thing, good-looking children are likely to be popular. Perhaps this is because children think that good looks go along with positive qualities. (J-1-7)

> In Harter's studies, physical appearance is clearly the most important area in determining self-worth, both for younger (grades 3 to 6) and older (grades 6 to 8) children. That is, children who see themselves as attractive are most likely to like themselves. (A-1-9)

> As we have seen already, in middle childhood, boys and girls play in different ways with their friends. They also talk about their friends in different ways. Girls are likely to dwell on how their friends look and on their personalities... But boys talk less about their friends'

> looks. A friend is a boy who likes playing the same games as you do, who always plays with you on the playground, who calls for you to walk with to school in the morning and walks home with you in the afternoon, who belongs to your "gang," and whom you call your "pal,""partner," or "buddy." (J-1-8)

Physical competence. The traditional gender stereotyped messages imparted by Western culture are that male competency is measured by performance while success for females is evaluated in terms of physical attractiveness. As cited by Ogletree et al. (1990), numerous authors identify the impact of these gender stereotyped expectations as having a measurable effect on individuals at younger and younger ages. At only a few months of age, Leipzig (1984) observed that girls are complimented on their appearance while boys are praised for their achievements, and even girls achievements are transformed into appearance.

Like the attractiveness stereotype for females, limited challenges are found in the reviewed texts to the gender stereotype that male success is measured by physical competence.

> ...it seems clear that much of the difference between the sexes' motor abilities has been due to differences in expectations and participation. Prepubescent boys and girls who take part in similar activities show similar abilities. Such findings indicate that there is no reason to separate prepubertal boys and girls for physical activities.... To help all children improve their motor skills, organized athletic programs should offer children the chance to try a variety of sports, should focus coaching on improving skills rather than on winning games, and should include as many youngsters as possible rather than concentrating on a few star athletes. (N-1-4 and N-1-5)
>
> In a study of the relationship between athletic skill and psychological well-being, Snyder and Kivlin (1975) found

> that adult female athletes had more positive body images than nonathletic women and were higher in psychological well-being. (C-2-16)
>
> The capacity of the lungs increases and the heart grows stronger, so with each passing year children are able to run faster and exercise longer than before. These changes can be affected by experience as well as maturation, as shown by studies of girls who train for serious competitive swimming, often beginning at age 8 or earlier. By adolescence, their lung and heart capacities are significantly greater than those of their peers who were comparable in body type and strength before the training. (I-1-1)

Yet, numerous examples were found during data collection that perpetuate the stereotype that physical competence equals worth for males but not for females.

> In elementary school, children compare themselves with one another, and those who are "behind" their classmates in areas related to physical maturation may feel deficient. Physical development during this period even affects friendships, for, in part, they become based on physical appearance and competence. Consequently, children who look "different," or who are noticeably lacking in physical skills, often become lonely and unhappy. (I-1-13)
>
> ...poor nutrition may cause problems in family relationships. Mothers may respond less frequently and less sensitively to malnourished babies, who lack the energy to engage a mother's attention. The infants, in turn, become unresponsive and develop poor interpersonal skills, further reducing their mothers' and other people's inclination or desire to interact with them. If the mother is malnourished too, the cycle worsens. (N-1-2)
>
> Rough-and-tumble play does not disappear when children grow out of the nursery. On any playground, older boys can be seen scuffling and tumbling about, while girls tend to engage in a milder variety of chase and flee, in which there is little physical contact. (M-2-26)

Self-esteem. As outlined in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, a sense of competency is the

anticipated positive outcome from the developmental polarities of industry versus inferiority in middle childhood. Tribe (1982) describes the child's personality at this stage as characterized by, "I am what I can learn" (p. 17). During middle childhood, children strive to master social, motor, and intellectual skills that are needed in everyday life and to prepare them for the challenges of subsequent developmental stages.

The development of self-esteem is the area of written text that most frequently challenges traditional gender stereotypes.

> Not all children's groups form on the basis of sex, however. The strong segregation of boys' and girls' groups that we see in the United States seems to arise to some extent from cultural demands. The most important factors in finding friends are likely to be compatibility, similarity, and shared goals. In our culture, with its age-segregated elementary school classes, sex is the most likely basis of similarity between children. (J-1-18)

> The involved father shows his children a nurturing side--expresses love, tries to help them with their worries and problems, makes them feel better when they are upset, and gives them continuing care and attention. Thus his children see a side of the personality that has traditionally been less visible in men. (N-2-26)

> ...teachers were more likely to praise girls whom they expected to do poorly than girls whom they expected to do well. It was the opposite for boys: The more the teacher expected of a boy, the more he was praised. Perhaps you can see how a gifted girl who is rarely praised for her achievements might eventually conclude that she must lack ability... By reacting differently to girls and boys, then, teachers may teach lessons that they never consciously intended to teach--lessons that can cause girls to doubt their academic abilities. (B-1-10)

> ...parents, teachers, and others who share responsibility for the rearing of children must be concerned with far more than their cognitive development or their physical well-being. They must also attend to the development of the

> self; they must do what they can to ensure that the evaluation that every child places on the self is a positive judgment, as far as possible. (A-1-11)
>
> An androgynous child incorporates positive aspects of both expressive and instrumental characteristics into his or her personality. Research indicates that androgynous personalities are healthier than those who are highly sex-typed. (E-1-22)

Still, there are numerous examples of text data that perpetuate gender stereotyped behaviors and expectations in the area of self-esteem development.

> In American society, boys are especially likely to be rewarded for competing and are especially likely to pick up competitive attitudes. Girls are likely to be rewarded for cooperation, and they take a dimmer view of competition. (J-1-11)
>
> Mothers are frequently concerned about how their sons will achieve a stable masculine self-concept without a live-in male role model. ...They should encourage independence and task mastery, praise their sons' strengths and capabilities, and present maleness in a positive light. ...Some mothers overprotect their sons and reward dependence. ...Some mothers who engage in overprotective behaviors also add a barrage of negative comments about men to their child-rearing tactics. The mother's comments about the inadequacy, incompetence, or worthlessness of men further decreases the son's sense of masculine worth. (E-1-23)
>
> The most generous children are not always the best adjusted psychologically, however. In a study of fourth-grade boys given the opportunity to donate to other children the prizes they had earned, the most generous boys tended to be naive and prone to guilty feelings. (J-1-17)

Over half of the texts cite the research by Coopersmith (1967) on self-esteem. However, this work reflects a gender bias as all the young subject were males, and the parents were mothers. Only a few texts identified this methodological limitation. In my

search for one text that incorporated research on girls (or both sexes), I finally discovered such a reference in Text "C".

> Why else might some children develop higher self-esteem than others do? As you might guess, parents can play a critical role. Stanley Coopersmith (1967) has discovered that boys with high self-esteem have mothers who are highly loving and accepting and who enforce clearly stated rules of behavior while allowing their children to express their opinions and participate in decision making. (B-1-2)

> Coopersmith (1967) administered a questionnaire to hundreds of fifth- and sixth-graders, both male and female. The boys and girls in this initial sample did not differ, on the average; but for intensive interviewing and observation, Coopersmith chose 85 boys and no girls, to eliminate gender as a possible factor. Although the final sample was limited to middle-class white boys within a 2-year span, the findings may apply more widely. (N-1-16)

> What promotes or lowers a child's self-esteem? A classic work by Coopersmith (1967) with 10-to 12-year-old boys provided important clues to this question. Coopersmith found that parents of boys with high self-esteem were more affectionate, accepting, and respectful, but that they also enforced rules consistently and held high standards for achievement. ...Harter (1983) cited evidence that the same parenting style has a positive effect on girl's self-esteem, too. (C-2-25)

Pictorial Data

Physical attractiveness. In all the texts, only two examples of pictures that challenged the attractiveness equals success were discovered. The central actor-agent in both of these pictures are children who are physically challenged.

> Picture with three girls in front of bookshelves and looking at a book. One girl is sitting in a wheelchair, and the other two girls are kneeling at each side of the wheelchair. The physically challenged girl is holding the book and the center of the activity. The others are looking at her and smiling. Caption: Mainstreaming in schools gives disabled

and nondisabled children an opportunity to learn how to get along and understand each other. (N-2-37)

Picture of two boys actively interacting and laughing with each other. One boy is physically challenged, wearing leg braces and using crutches. Caption: Mainstreaming works particularly well for children who are physically disabled but who have no social or academic deficits.

The majority of pictorial representations in middle childhood perpetuates physical attractiveness as the stereotyped measure of worth and success.

Photograph of a young woman who is standing in front of a large mirror and applying eye makeup. Caption: The importance of facial attractiveness to the body image of a woman in our society is illustrated by the careful attention paid to the application of makeup. (C-2-15)

Picture of three children, two girls and one boy, sitting on the floor in front of the television. The television screen shows a picture of Miss America standing at the end of the pageant run-way. Caption: Television influences the social development of children with its own views of reality and pictures of how the "rest of the world" acts and reacts. (E-1-7)

Picture of two girls. The taller girl is thin and dressed in a ballerina costume. She is actively working on the other girl's hair who is passively standing. The shorter girl weighs more and is dressed in leotard and shorts or pants. Caption: Even if they join in physical activities and are accepted by their peers, overweight children often feel painfully self-conscious, especially when the activity requires donning a costume that calls more attention to one's appearance. (I-1-2)

Picture of 11 preadolescent girls and boys at an outdoors picnic. Two preadolescents, a boy and a girl, are in the foreground. The boy is seated at the picnic table and looking at the girl. The girl is standing by the picnic table and cutting a slice of watermelon. Caption: STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE: PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS Among the most important traits influencing peer relationships and popularity are those having to do with physical attractiveness and body build. Children who meet their

culture's standards enjoy a decided advantage in their peer relationships over youngster who do not. (K-1-4)

Physical competence. Examples are limited of photographs that challenge the gender stereotype of male achievement as evaluated by physical competence. There were some pictures that portray girls as physically competent and successful.

Photograph of eight girls outdoors playing soccer. Three primary subjects are looking intently at the soccer ball as they are kicking it. Caption: These enthusiastic soccer players are proving that girls are often much better athletes than they were given credit for (or given the opportunity to be) in the past. (N-2-36)

Picture of 12 children playing soccer outdoors. The six girls in the foreground are the primary focus of the activity as they are chasing and kicking the ball. Caption: Peers use reinforcement and punishment to enforce appropriate behavior; among these girls a good kicker will be praised. (M-2-19)

Picture of two children, a girl and boy, playing violins. Both children are looking down at their violin. Caption: Relationships with peers, abstract activities, and developing physical skills all occupy middle childhood youngsters. The success that children achieve in these activities contribute significantly to an emerging sense of competence. (D-1-14)

Numerous examples perpetuating the gender stereotype of male physical competence were found. In fact, the majority of photographs depict males as the positive, active agents.

Drawings (silhouettes) of the three basic body builds or physiques (ectomorph, mesomorph, and endomorph) with personality characteristics listed under each body type. Caption: Studies correlating body build and temperament have had a profound impact on social stereotyping but remain controversial. Can you think of children who are exceptions to these characterizations? (E-1-2)

> Picture of school-age boy walking (balancing) on top of a stone wall. Caption: Norman, healthy school-age children delight in attempting daring deeds that demonstrate their gross and fine motor coordination and muscular agility. Adult supervisors should remind children to play in safe areas and obey safety precautions. Most of the 19 million annual accidental injuries to school-age children are preventable. (E-1-3)
>
> Picture of nine girls on stage in dance leotards, tights, and ballet slippers. Caption: From the time that children are about eight years old, they begin comparing their own performance with that of their peers. How well they feel they measure up may affect their feelings of competence. (M-2-22)

Self-esteem. A number of examples were identified that challenge the gender stereotyped characteristics for both females and males.

> Photograph of girl carrying newspapers in a bag and holding a folded newspaper. Her arm is bent backwards as if she is preparing to throw the paper. Caption: This newspaper deliverer is accomplishing several important tasks of middle childhood related to the self-concept. By taking on responsibilities to match her growing capabilities, she learns about how her society works, her role in it, and what doing a job well means. (N-1-13)
>
> Picture of two boys with arms around each other's neck and shoulders. Both are smiling widely. Caption: During middle childhood, peer relationships become increasingly important for social development. Children are attracted to those who share their interests, who play well with them, and who help them to learn abut themselves. (D-1-18)
>
> Picture of two boys folding towels and standing next to table with folded laundry. Caption: Most children whose mothers work outside the home are expected to help with household chores, a responsibility that tends to increase a child's self-esteem. (M-1-14)

Approximately an equal number of photographs depict girls and

boys with typical gender stereotyped roles or characteristics.

> Drawings by three children (one 9-year-old girl and two 11-year-old boys) responding to: Where would you put a third eye? Girl draws a third eye in the middle of her forehead. Caption: Where would you put a third eye? Tanya did not show much inventiveness in drawing her "third eye." But, Ken (age 11) said of his eye on top of a tuft of hair, " could revolve the eye to look in all directions." John (also 11) wanted a third eye in his palm: "I could see around corners and see what kind of cookie I'll get out of the cookie jar." Ken and John show early signs of formal-operational thought.
> (B-1-11)

> Photograph of three children (one boy in the foreground and two girls in the background). The boy's eyes are cast upward, and he appears to be the active participant. The girls' heads are bowed with eyes cast downward. Caption: Contestants in a spelling bee can make good use of mnemonic strategies--devices to aid memory. This boy may be trying to remember by putting a word into a mental category with other words that contain similar elements. (N-1-12)

> Photograph of a boy working on a project at a classroom table. In the background, the bulletin board displays several papers under the heading of "MATH ACTIVITIES". Caption: Although boys and girls tend to perform equally well in their math courses, both sexes see the subject as more useful for boys--who generally like mother better than girls. (M-2-32)

Few texts present an integration of non-stereotyped themes related to a diversity of physical competence and self-esteem. In a majority of texts, physical difference as diversity is neither acknowledged or overtly valued. Although most texts present physical differences related to weight and height, this information is usually correlated with problems in social competence and peer relationships. A majority of texts identify physical difference, especially size and body build, as

problematic.

The illustrations (especially photographs) and illustrative examples included in the written text are most consistent areas that exemplify and perpetuate gender stereotypes. The children depicted in the vast majority of pictures are very attractive, very middle class, very male, and very white. Not only does this important component of texts reinforce gender stereotypes, it reinforces that white, middle-class males are the essential (or at least important) representatives of the middle childhood experience. Lower socio-economic classes and non-white children, especially females of color, are almost invisible; and if they do exist, they are not significant.

Only four texts present substantial information that acknowledges and challenges traditional gender stereotyped perspectives. The overwhelming majority fail to introduce data or resources that could stimulate discussion and understanding of these issues beyond traditional stereotypes.

## Summary

As professional educators, we expect developmental texts currently available for undergraduate and graduate courses to be far superior to the gender stereotypes presented on Saturday morning television. Developmental texts are making some progress. However, many of these stereotypes that are found throughout our culture and are included in text books.

An important implication of this study is the need for

sensitivity to the concerns, fears, questions, and issues that children may have about physical development, competence, and self-esteem. As professional educators, we must take the initiative to carefully review the developmental texts we use (and require students to purchase). By using a critical review, we can strengthen the weaknesses of many developmental texts through supplemental readings, discussions, or media presentations.

Our culture is obsessed with the expectation of an ultra-thin physique as the ideal woman's body. The psychological and emotion price paid by women whose bodies do not conform to the rigidly constructed norms of thinness is staggering. Referring to our culture's obsession with thinness, Dr. Susan Wooley (1987), indicates it can lead to problems of self-esteem, self-hatred, and disturbed body image.

This study highlights the importance for educators in evaluating, selecting, or developing materials and resources that address the needs and concerns of children related to physical competence and self-esteem. These efforts can make a valuable contribution to a healthier, more positive self-perception of all children. This is especially important to the development of girls and young women since the cultural expectation of physical attractiveness, as the primary measure of competence, is negatively impacting females' physical health and self-concept at a younger and younger age (Surrey, 1984).

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Table 1

Data Sources: Life-Span Human Development Texts

| Text Code | Year Published | Edition | Organization | Publisher |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 1990 | 3rd | Sequential | AA |
| B | 1991 | 1st | Integrated | BB |
| C | 1991 | 1st | Integrated | CC |
| D | 1991 | 1st | Sequential | DD |
| E | 1987 | 3rd | Sequential | EE |
| F | 1992 | 1st | Sequential | CC |
| G | 1987 | 3rd | Sequential | FF |
| H | 1989 | 4th | Sequential | FF |
| I | 1988 | 2nd | Sequential | GG |
| J | 1988 | 1st | Sequential | HH |
| K | 1989 | 4th | Sequential | II |
| L | 1991 | 5th | Sequential | BB |
| M | 1988 | 5th | Sequential | JJ |
| N | 1992 | 5th | Sequential | KK |

Table 2

Frequency of Gender Stereotypes Challenged or Perpetuated

| Data Source | Physical Attractiveness | Physical Competence | Self-Esteem |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Challg./Perpet. | Challg./Perpet. | Challg./Perpet. |
| A (1990) | 1/3 | 1/2 | 2/1 |
| B (1991) | 0/0 | 0/1 | 9/3 |
| C (1991) | 7/4 | 2/3 | 6/5 |
| D (1991) | 0/0 | 1/3 | 5/4 |
| E (1987) | 0/1 | 2/3 | 3/3 |
| F (1992) | 0/2 | 3/2 | 4/2 |
| G (1987) | 0/1 | 3/2 | 4/2 |
| H (1989) | 0/2 | 0/2 | 1/6 |

(table continues)

Table 2

Frequency of Gender Stereotypes Challenged or Perpetuated

| Data Source | Physical Attractiveness | Physical Competence | Self-Esteem |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Challg./Perpet. | Challg./Perpet. | Challg./Perpet. |
| I (1988) | 1/5 | 6/6 | 5/5 |
| J (1988) | 0/3 | 3/3 | 3/5 |
| K (1989) | 0/4 | 0/1 | 5/10 |
| L (1991) | 1/0 | 0/0 | 3/4 |
| M (1988) | 1/3 | 1/1 | 14/8 |
| N (1992) | 0/2 | 2/3 | 9/7 |

## Appendix

### Stereotypic Sex-Role Characteristics

| Feminine | Masculine |
|---|---|
| Devotes self to others | Very aggressive |
| Very dependent | Very independent |
| Very emotional | Stands up under pressure |
| Very subjective | Very objective |
| Very submissive | Very dominant |
| Dislikes math and science | Likes math and science |
| Very passive | Very active |
| Not at all competitive | Very competitive |
| Very home oriented | Very worldly |
| Likes children | Very direct |
| Feelings easily hurt | Doesn't give up easily |
| Expresses tender feelings | Very adventurous |
| Has difficulty making decisions | Makes decisions easily |
| Cries very easily | Never cries |
| Needs approval | Acts as a leader |
| Lacks self-confident | Very self-confident |
| Not ambitious | Very ambitious |
| Very conceited about appearance | Skilled in business |
| Very talkative | Takes a stand |

(appendix continues)

## Appendix

## Stereotypic Sex-Role Characteristics

| Feminine | Masculine |
|---|---|
| Very tactful | Very blunt |
| Very gentle | Very rough |
| Very aware of others' feelings | Not at all aware of feelings |
| Very interested in appearance | Little interest in appearance |
| Very neat | Very sloppy |
| Very quiet | Very loud |
| Very strong need for security | Little need for security |
| Enjoys art and literature | Likes sports |
| Creative | Mechanical aptitude |
| Kind | Not easily influenced |
| Understanding | Outspoken |

Adapted from: Broverman, S.M., Clarkson, F.E., & Rosenkrantz, P.S. (1972). Sex role stereotypes: A current appraisal. Journal of Social Issues, 28(2), 59-78. Ruble, T. L. (1983). Sex stereotypes: Issues of change in the 1970's. Sex Roles, 9, 397-402.